



December 15, 2011

**Ruth Grover**

**Park and Planning, Urban Planning**

**RE: Proposed Monroe Gardens Detailed Site Plan**

On Tuesday December 13<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held to discuss the Detailed Site Plan for Monroe Gardens (DSP-10045). In attendance was a quorum of the Cheverly Planning Board, members of the Green Infrastructure Committee, concerned Cheverly residents as well as the Council Member David Thorpe and Mayor Michael Callahan. The contents of this note have been shared with the entire Planning Board and members of the Town Council.

We were unable to take an official Town Council vote due to the very short public notice provided. We will take that vote in our January Public meeting.

**Summary Position:** As with other revitalization proposals for this area, the Town of Cheverly sees redevelopment as a positive action. This proposal represents one of the first significant redevelopment efforts in the unincorporated area between Cheverly and Bladensburg, and it is the Town of Cheverly's hope that it set a high standard for other proposals that will potentially improve our community as well as Prince George's County.

We used a guiding principle in our analysis of the DSP objectives from the New Carrollton Bladensburg Master Plan. One specific objective from Page 13 of the plan seemed particularly appropriate; ***"To locate development according to opportunities and constraints presented by the local environmental characteristics."***

We found the developer's plan at odds with this objective. Even the developer acknowledges that this development does not adhere to the "constraints of the environmental characteristics" on page 5 of their submission. The developer requests a variance from parking ordinances with the statement, ***"This narrow lot creates a situation in which there is limited space for the building and parking under today's standards. Furthermore, the site is traversed by the stream and the accompanying floodplain and stream buffers on the site create a situation in which only a very limited area of the site can be developed."***

In our review of this DSP, clearly this site does not support the scope and size of the developer's proposal. Therefore it is our position that the DSP be rejected unless significant changes are made to the plans that would protect Quincy Run and provide adequate recreation resources to the residents of the development. It would seem unlikely these goals could be achieved without significantly altering the structure of the building and decreasing the density of the development.

**Environmental Impact:**

- **Existing Conditions:** Quincy Run is a stream that directly abuts this property, and flows directly to the Anacostia River and to the Chesapeake Bay. Quincy Run is currently extremely degraded with severe erosion and damage to existing retaining walls and storm drains upstream and downstream.

The Town of Cheverly and the National Park Service have plans to remove 4 homes from the headwaters of this stream in an effort to improve water quality and reduce the velocity and volume of runoff to prevent continuing damage to the stream. Developments such as Newton Green (recently built) and Monroe Gardens (not built) continue to exacerbate the erosion problems. The result of erosion can be found at the mouth of the stream where it is silted in.

- **Building Footprint:** According to the site plans the building footprint is being doubled to support the increased density. The increased footprint dramatically affects the land's ability to absorb and filter stormwater runoff. The plans show no drainage plans or even drain pipes. Installation of an underground stormwater storage device (as indicated on one drawing) within the extensive fill area behind the massive retaining wall is a highly inferior, last resort approach to runoff reduction. If ever there is a site calling out for a green roof and advanced use of environmental site design, this is it.
- **Impervious Surface:** Not only is building footprint doubling, the plans also show that virtually the entire site will be covered with impervious surfaces in the form of buildings or surface parking. Today there is approximately an average of 50 feet of grassy area between the structures and the stream bed. Instead of restoring this to a forested stream buffer this will be completely eliminated. There is no stormwater plan with calculations of current and expanded runoff and plans for onsite treatment, so the obvious implication is that there will be serious erosion and damage to downstream neighboring properties.
- **Encroachment on Quincy Run:** In order to accommodate the planned parking the developer has extended the south western corner of the development by approximately 30 feet. This is accomplished by extending the retaining wall and placing fill behind it. This massive wall appears to extend into the existing stream area and will cause a redirection of the existing stream. This will further contribute to increased water flow, increased erosion and channelization of Quincy Run. Again this creates property and stream damage downstream.
- **Retention Wall:** Not only will the retention wall (apparently 16 feet high in some places) encroach on the streambed, it extends well beyond the Primary Management Area (PMA). The PMA is drawn on the map but is omitted from the associated text. **This major reconfiguration of the stream bank does not appear to be an ecologically feasible or friendly strategy to improve the stream at this site and will only serve to increase damage downstream.** Given the damage to existing retention walls along the stream, how will the developer insure the long term integrity of the structure?

#### Resident Quality of Life:

- **Recreation Space:** The developer is planning 127 units for sale but has not allocated any space to meeting or exercise areas. This lack of internal facilities places significant stress when the 318 planned residents are looking for activity. Especially since the nearest public facility (Bladensburg Community Center) is a 1 mile walk.

The developer has allocated \$120K for investment in recreational facilities (according to formula). However, there is no property nearby that could be purchased to provide recreation.

The existing 2.5 acre site currently contains approximately 1.5 acres of grassy area surrounding the buildings. This is area that can be used for playing, sitting or barbecuing. However, when this site is "revitalized" all that space will be gone. The developer consistently mentions the upgrading of the "post World War II structures" however the area for outdoor recreation and enjoyment will be eliminated.

- **Density:** The revitalization code creates a minimum threshold of 12 units per acre and does not have a stated maximum. This plan calls for 52 units per acre. The land is not large enough to support this type of density while protecting the environmental integrity of the site without creating a much taller structure with a much smaller footprint. Aside from "common sense" issues caused by such density, obvious objective data puts such density plans into question. For example, the planned parking does not support the amount of units being

planned. Even with the 30% parking reduction provided by code, the developer needs another variance for 14% more. This request comes in spite of using virtually the entire site as a parking lot.

- **Transportation:** This site is only supported by bus transportation and there is a scarcity of nearby employers. While some residents may use the bus line for transportation to the subway it is unlikely this development will attract residents without automobiles. While public transportation may alleviate parking requirements, there is no mention of plans to improve sidewalks, bus stops or Metro access.

**Recommendations:**

- Significantly reduce the impervious surface area of the project (on the order of 40% or more) from the current plans.
- Design the project to recognize Quincy Run as an amenity and include first rate stream restoration design that results in improvements in the quality and character of the stream.
- Require the developer to provide on-site recreational facilities.
- That the Bladensburg and Cheverly Police Departments and Bladensburg Volunteer Fire Departments be asked for comment regarding public safety issues.

In conclusion, we reiterate that any development of the Monroe Gardens site proceed “according to opportunities and constraints presented by the local environmental characteristics.” In this case the overriding site design factor is the location and condition of Quincy Run.

This proposal is a major disappointment from conception to design. It is not the quality proposal that the community requires and deserves, but will be a liability to the community, to taxpayers, and undermines the massive cooperative effort now underway to restore the Anacostia River and Chesapeake Bay. This proposal should not proceed as designed. .

Sincerely,

Mike

Mike Callahan, Mayor Town of Cheverly

**Other Signatures;**

Jeremy Coon, Chairman Cheverly Planning Board  
Chad Clay, Cheverly Planning Board  
Hugh Guest, Cheverly Planning Board  
Vinny Herman, Cheverly Planning Board  
Abel Olivo, Cheverly Planning Board  
Margaret MacDonnell, Cheverly Planning Board  
Sheila Salo, Cheverly Green Infrastructure Committee  
Dan Smith, Friends of Lower Beaverdam Creek  
David Thorpe, Councilmember Ward 2  
RJ Eldridge, Councilmember Ward 3